

Hazrat
A'ISHAH
SIDDIQAH

(May God be pleased with her)

**A Study of her age at the time
of her marriage**

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(Based on the researches of)
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INTRODUCTION

Aishah was a great Muslim lady, the daughter of the Prophet's closest companion Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafah, better known to us as Abu Bakr, and his second wife, Umm Ruman. She was the 'second beloved' of the Prophet, the joy of the last years of his life. She was so famous that it seems quite extraordinary that some of the best-known facts about her should be challenged. This, however, is what this pamphlet proposes to do.

As a writer, I have been obliged to come to terms with two unfortunate but apparently unshakeable facts of life; the first is that no matter how hard one tries, or pays attention to the work one is doing, it is impossible to avoid slips in one's work creeping in – through tiredness, momentary lack of concentration, interruptions, mind too full of racing thoughts, etc. Once the slip is in, it may lie there unnoticed, even by the original author, through many proof-readings. The second fact of life is that once things have been written down and appeared in public, they get repeated and copied by others, ad infinitum – often without question, and usually without consulting the original sources to check accuracy.

In this concise booklet, we consider what may possibly be the most serious piece of mis-information in the whole of Muslim history – the long-unchallenged notion that the Prophet's third wife Aishah, the daughter of his dear friend Abu Bakr, was only six when she accepted nikah with the Prophet, that she married him physically when she was around nine years old, and was around eighteen when he died. One can find these 'facts' quoted again and again; moreover, they appear to be based on the most trustworthy of authorities – the hadith collections of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, an-Nisa'i and Ibn-e-Majah.

However, there are many points to consider. Firstly, all of these authorities seem to have based their conclusions solely on the work of Aishah's relative, the historian Hisham ibn Urwah, the grandson of Aishah's sister Asma. One might think, therefore, that they were extremely accurate. However, Hisham's accuracy in other matters was challenged. The matters pertaining to Aishah were supposedly obtained from Hisham's father, but apparently these particular hadiths were offered only in Iraq and were unknown to the people of Madinah, and must necessarily, therefore, be regarded as not entirely trustworthy. (The reasons are given in the booklet).

In order to help the reader form his or her own judgment, certain fixed dates and terms should be placed before them.

- The birth of the Prophet was in 570 CE.
- His Call to the Prophethood occurred in 610 CE.
- The year his wife Khadijah died was 619 CE.
- The most likely year of his nikah to Aishah was 620 CE.
- The Hijrah to Madinah took place in 622 CE.
- The Prophet's full marriage to Aishah was in 2 AH/623-4 CE.
- The Prophet died in 10 AH/632 CE.
- Most authorities agree that Aishah died in 50 AH/672 CE.

The conclusions formed about the dates and age of Aishah rest on three separate theories. The first, and most widely accepted throughout the Muslim world, is that she was born in the fourth year of the Prophethood (ie 614 CE). This is based on one reference in Ibn Sa'd's work, which seems to be contradicted by many of his later statements. If this was true, it would mean she was indeed five when Khadijah died, six when her nikah was performed, nine in the year of her full

marriage, and eighteen when the Prophet died. However, it would also mean that if she did die in 672 CE she was only fifty-eight, and not sixty-seven as most authorities report.

The second theory is that she was born some four years before the Prophethood, in 605-6 CE. This would mean she was 4/5 when he was called to his mission, 14/15 when Khadijah died, 15/16 at her nikah, 19 in the year of her full marriage, and 27/28 when he died. She would have indeed been sixty-seven when she died in 50 AH. (Sometimes one has to be flexible with the years, because people tend to 'round things up' and take into account the number of months in any year as a complete year – ie, if someone was sixteen years and eight months old, people might well say she was nearly seventeen.)

The third theory is that she was five years younger than Fatimah, who was said to have been born five years before the Prophet's call, therefore making the year of Aishah's birth in that very year, 610. If this was true, she would have been 9 when Khadijah died, 10 at her nikah, 12 in the year of Hijrah, 14 when she married him, 22 when he died, and 62 when she died.

The argument based on the age of Fatimah has a further complication, however, since her own dates are disputed. Isaba, for example, agreed that she was born in 605 since when she married Ali in 625 she was 20. Yet she was said to have been 29 when the Prophet (and she herself) died in the year 632 – which pushes her birth year back to 603.

The concept of nikah of a six-year-old Aishah has given ammunition to the enemies of Islam – which cannot be helped if it is true. However, so many given facts make this suggestion seem debatable.

My own personal conclusion from it all would be that Aishah was born in 605-6, and that Ibn Sa'd had been cursed by a glaring example of writer's slip which went unnoticed and got repeated ad infinitum by those who used him as a primary source. The slip, I believe, was that he stated that Aishah was born in the fourth year of the Prophethood, when what he actually meant was that she was born four years before the Prophethood.

This makes all the points raised by the author in this booklet completely sensible, and of prime importance to our own generation of Islamic scholars.

Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood
29 September 1996

AISHAH'S MARRIAGE AND HER EXACT AGE

Many Islamic traditions maintain that the marriage of Aishah with the Prophet took place when she was just six years old, in the tenth year of his Prophethood (620 CE), and that she entered his house as his fully wedded wife after the Migration to Madinah in the month of Shawwal, (623 CE – 1 AH), when she was merely nine.

This is the view traditionally accepted by hadith scholars from early times, as well as most historians of our own time.

Unfortunately, these traditionists and biographers hold their views by choosing to ignore several important pieces of evidence which contradict this opinion, which indicate that at the time of her marriage to the Prophet, Aishah was much older, indeed as much as ten years older than generally claimed.

The basic problem is that our historians and traditionists seem to have chosen not to do a little elementary mathematics. Many have reported statements that are supposed to be factual which are in blatant contradiction to the notion that Aishah was only six in 620 CE.

The supposed extreme youth of this wife of the Prophet has given ammunition to those who, for all sorts of reasons, wish to cast doubt on the authenticity of her hadith material. What is more, it has enabled enemies and critics of Islam to poke fun at the Prophet's personal life and portray him as a rather selfish voluptuary. Certainly it suggests that he took advantage of such a young girl by entering into a marital relationship with her at a time when she could not possibly have had the maturity to consider any marriage proposals or partners with adequate care.

Some Muslims have countered this sort of criticism by maintaining that marriage arrangements as early as this are quite in order when the young girl is mature for her years.¹

Some Muslims even use the supposed extremely early marriage of Aishah (with its following success and happiness) as an excuse to justify marrying off their own female relatives at pre-pubertal age, or just as they are entering puberty. However, this practice is considered to be outrageous by critics from cultures where this is illegal and not acceptable at all. It is considered particularly offensive if the society that allows such immature girls to marry also makes it extremely difficult for them to gain their freedom later, if the marriage turns out to be disastrous.²

This can be particularly the case when the girl is married to an uncle or cousin. Brides from separate families can be divorced far more easily than brides from one's own family, where huge traumatic rifts might occur. Obviously the practice of restricting divorce where spouses have rejected each other, for genuine reasons, makes a nonsense of Allah's principles and commands in such Qur'anic passages as Sura al-Talaq.

¹ For example, Maulana Abu al-Wafa Thana' Allah Amritsari (Muqaddas Rasul – the Holy Prophet) justified it by comparing Aishah's marriage to that of a case quoted by the ancient Hindu philosopher Majuji. He thought it quite proper for a girl of eight years to marry a man of thirty. The fact that Aishah was said to have been only six, and the Prophet over fifty seems to have escaped him!

² Examples include Pandit Kalicharan – 'Vichita Jeevan'; and Mr. Rajpal – 'Rangila Rasul – the Epicurean Prophet, 1934 who questioned: 'Why did Muhammad settle his marriage with a minor who was the age of his grand-daughter?' (p.19).

It may be worth noting in passing that the Prophet did indeed marry one of his cousins shortly after his marriage to Aishah – Zainab bint Jahsh – but she was his seventh wife and very far from being his first choice!

There is another, and more preserve aspect to consider that has nothing to do with the virtues or otherwise of a child marriage. There are some who deliberately prefer to emphasize the supposed extreme youthfulness of Aishah in order to negate or cast suspicion on her narrations regarding the various Prophetic traditions. It is a known fact, for example, that traditions emanating from the centres at Kufa and Karbala, because of the splits occurring after the death of the Prophet, tended naturally to favour the Prophet's son-in-law Ali and his family line, and are far less sympathetic towards Aishah.

It is therefore worth stating that the origins of the hadiths concerning Aishah's extreme youth at the time of her marriage do seem to have emanated from Iraq, and there is no evidence that they were known in Madinah in the earliest times – which makes them suspect.

The correct age of Aishah at the time of her marriage should be far more carefully examined by today's scholars, so that there is no question of rejecting her traditions as being impossible because of her extreme youth.

A deal of nonsense is also talked about the ages and marital inclinations of the Prophet's other wives, incidentally. Whereas it may certainly be true that he did marry some of them out of pity or political and family convenience, there is no point in making foolish remarks about their elderliness. The younger ones were by repute extremely beautiful, and the older ones had been close friends of the Prophet for many years and amongst the earliest of his converts. Moreover, the Prophet was singularly used to a marital relationship with an older woman – since his sole partner for some twenty-five years was at least fifteen years older than himself. The Prophet did not remarry until he was over fifty, and when he was fifty his beloved Khadijah was sixty-five! None of his subsequent wives had attained that age by the time of his death. Several of his wives were in their teens when he married them, presumably of similar age to Aishah.

THE ANCIENT HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Though historians differ regarding Aishah's exact year of birth, some facts are available hidden in historical references, which can bring us to various conclusions.

One early historian who gave a precise statement was Ibn Sa'd, who recorded in his 'Tabaqat' that Aishah was born in the fourth year of the Prophethood (ie 614 CE). Thus, she would indeed have been six years old if her nikah took place in 620.

This tally precisely with such hadiths as these two recorded in the collection of al-Bukhari:

5.43. 234. Narrated Aishah: The Prophet engaged me when I was a girl of six (years). We went to Madinah and stayed at the home of Bani-al-Harith bin Khazraj. Then I got ill and my hair fell out. Later on my hair grew (again) and my mother, Umm Ruman, came to me while I was playing in a swing with some of my girl friends. She called me, and I went to her, not knowing what she wanted to do to me. She caught me by the hand and made me stand at the door of the house. I was breathless then, and when my breathing became normal, she took

some water and rubbed my face and head with it. Then she took me into the house. There in the house I saw some Ansari women who said, "Best wishes and Allah's Blessing and a good luck." Then she entrusted me to them and they prepared me (for the marriage). Unexpectedly Allah's Messenger came to me in the forenoon and my mother handed me over to him, and at that time I was a girl of nine years of age.

5.43. 236. Narrated Hisham's father: Khadijah died three years before the Prophet departed to Madinah. He stayed there for two years or so and then he married Aishah when she was a girl of six years of age, and he consummated that marriage when she was nine years old.

However, there is considerable evidence produced by other biographers that is not compatible with the theory that she married at the age of six. Indeed, other narratives of Ibn Sa'd himself contradict this view.

SOME THOUGHT-PROVOKING SUGGESTIONS

Some have suggested that Aishah was born in 610 CE, some 11 or 12 years before the Migration to Madinah in 622, which would mean that at the time of her full marriage she would have been around 14 years old, and not 9.³

Some have suggested that she was born in 605 CE and thus when Muhammad attained the Prophethood she would have already been 5 years old, 17 in the year of Hijrah, and 19 when she took full marriage.⁴

Another suggestion is that at the time of her nikah Aishah was 16 years old (sittah 'ashra). It is quite possible that the later authors, while quoting the figures, mistakenly omitted 'ashar (ten in Arabic), thus changing 16 to 6 years old.⁵

SOME HISTORICAL FACTS THAT NEED CONSIDERING CAREFULLY

Many facts, ignored by early scholars, should be examined very carefully indeed before today's scholars conclude that Aishah was only six at her nikah.

1. The age of Aishah in relationship to the age of her sister Asma

One theory involves the relationship of her age to that of her half-sister Asma. There are two facts which, if established, make it impossible for Aishah to have been only six at her nikah. Firstly it is stated that Asma was ten years older than Aishah, and secondly that she died in 73 AH at the very advanced age of 100 years.

³ 'Aishah', compiled by Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad and translated into Urdu by Shaykh Muhammad Ahmad Panipati, p.44.

⁴ 'Sayyidah Aishah Siddiqah' by Miyan Muhammad Said, p.5.

⁵ Ibid. p.8; 'Muhammad the Prophet' by Muhammad Ali Lahori, p.229.

Abdur Rahman ibn Arabi al-Zinad (753 AH), for example, was an early historian noted for his knowledge of Arab lineage. He stated that Asma was older than her sister by ten years.⁶

Ibn Kathir Dimashqui (1373 CE) stated that Asma breathed her last in 73 AH when she was 100 years old, and was older than her sister Aishah by ten years.⁷

The date was easily fixed in the mind as she died just a few days after her son Abdullah ibn Zubayr was killed in battle. Ibn Abd al-Barr (1071 CE) gives the same facts, though he dates her death a few months (not days) after the death of Abdullah.⁸

If Asma truly was 10 years older than Aishah, and truly was 100 years old in 73 AH, then Aishah would have been 90 had she lived to that year, and by simple subtraction of dates, since 73 AH is the equivalent of 695 CE (622, the year of Hijrah plus 73), she must have been born in 605 CE.

Furthermore, if – as is claimed – Asma was born 27 years prior to the Hijrah, then Aishah must have been born 17 years prior to it. So, if the generally accepted tradition that Aishah entered the Prophet's home as his fully married wife in 2 AH/624 CE, she must have been 19 and not 9.⁹

2. Abu Bakr's children were born before the advent of Islam

Ibn Jarir at-Tabari, an eminent historian of the early era, stated:

'Abu Bakr married two women in the pre-Islamic era, who gave birth to four children. Abdullah and Asma were by Qatilah, while Abdur Rahman and Aishah were by Umm Ruman bint Amir. All these children were born before the advent of Islam'.¹⁰

The advent of Islam was 610 CE; so, if Aishah was born before that, then she must have been at the very least 12 years of age in the year of Hijrah, and at least 14 at the time of her marriage in 2 AH (624 CE).

Moreover, it is not stated that Aishah was born just immediately before the advent of Islam. Tabari talks of her birth as being 'during the days of ignorance (jahiliyah)', which seems to suggest that it was not right at the end of that period in history. So, if Aishah was born as much as a year before the end of Ignorance, then it is more likely that she was 15 at the time of her marriage.

3. Abu Bakr's marriage to Umm Ruman

Abu Bakr married Umm Ruman when he was 28. So, if we make the natural assumption that their children Abdur Rahman and Aishah were born in the first 4-5 years of their marriage (assuming that she did not use birth control and breastfed her children), then it would mean that Abu Bakr would most likely have been around 32-33 years old when Aishah was born. The Prophet is known to

⁶ 'Siyar-u-A'la-an-Nubala' by Muhammad Ali Lahori, p.229)

⁷ Al-Bidayay wa'n-Nihayah', published in Egypt, 8/34.

⁸ 'Al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifah al-Ashab-Asab published in Egypt, 2/5-7.

⁹ The date of her marriage as 2 AH was agreed by al-Nawawi, Ibn Kathir, Qastallani and Badruddin al-Ayni and many others – 'Tahdhib al-Asma wa-al-Lighat' by Al-Nawawi, 'Al-Bidayah wa-al-Nihayah' by Ibn Kathir, 'Al-Mawahib al-Ladunniyah' by Qastallani, and 'Umdah al-Qari' by Badruddin al-Ayni.

¹⁰ 'Tarikh al-Ummam wa al-Muluk' (Egypt) Vol IV. pp9-15

have been two years older than Abu Bakr, so at this time, he would have been 34-35.

Now, since we know that the Prophethood was bestowed upon him in his 40th year, it once again adds up to the conclusion that Aishah must have been born 5-6 years prior to the Prophethood, i.e. in c 605 CE, and that would make her 19 and not 9 at the time of her marriage.

4. Aishah was one of the first children to embrace Islam

One of Ibn Hisham's statements in his 'Sirah of the Prophet' was that Ali and Aishah were amongst the first children to embrace Islam. Although Ibn Hisham sometimes makes rather strange statements – for example, he included Zaid bin Harith as one of the first men – which was a little odd since Zaid was around the same age as Ali, some ten years old – there is no reason to conclude that Aishah was not one of the first children to take the faith.

If Aishah really was one of the first children to embrace Islam, it must necessarily have been after the call to Prophethood in 610. Now, if Aishah was not born until four years after this, and we must surely assume that she must have been at least four years old before we can realistically speak of her accepting a faith herself, then her acceptance of Islam must have occurred in around 618. In that year it is highly unlikely that she could still have qualified as one of the first children to accept it. Many others had done so by then.

However, if she was born some four years before the call, then it does make sense.

Actually, Aishah claimed to have been the 19th person to accept Islam; this would obviously have been impossible if she did not take the faith until around 618. It would still be impossible even if she was born in 614, incidentally.

5. Some background details of the marriage

The Prophet became very sad after the demise of his beloved first wife, Khadijah. In view of this, plus the fact that he had four young daughters to bring up, his aunt Khawlah bint Hakim offered to search out a new wife for him, either a virgin or a widow, according to his choice.¹¹

She suggested two possibilities, Aishah the daughter of his closest friend, and the other being one of the earliest Muslims – Sawdah bint Zamah, the widow of Sakran ibn Amr, brother of the tribal leader Suhayl.

Neither the Prophet nor Abu Bakr nor Khawlah raised the issue of Aishah's minor age. Had she been only six, Abu Bakr might have raised this as an objection, even though he would have obviously been pleased to consider the match. The one objection he did raise was that of his own relationship of brotherhood with the Prophet; he had thought that Aishah could not be married to the Prophet as she was regarded as his niece.

In reply to this, the Prophet made it crystal clear that a person who was not an actual blood relative could never count in law as if he was one, no matter how close they were, unless they had shared the breast milk of the same woman. He

¹¹ 'Tabaqat' of Ibn Sa'd (9 vols. Leiden); 'Musnad' of Ibn Hanbal (6 vols, Cairo) Vi.409.

sent a message to the effect that Abu Bakr was his brother-in-Islam not a brother by blood, and this could never be a hurdle to settling a marriage.

The much more serious hurdle was that Aishah had long been engaged to Jubayr ibn Mut'im ibn Adi, a young man who had not embraced Islam – an engagement which was an embarrassment to both parties. Jubayr's parents were concerned that their son would be coerced into accepting Islam once he was married to Aishah. They were happy to end the engagement and release Aishah to marry the Prophet.

Therefore, it is not out of the question that Khawlah could have advised the Prophet to marry a minor; after all, Aishah had already been engaged to Jubayr in the pre-Islamic period.

What it does indicate, though, is that this prior engagement could surely not have taken place after the advent of Islam, as the very fact that Aishah was a Muslim was used as the excuse for breaking it off.

So, if Aishah had been engaged to Jubayr before the advent of Islam, she cannot have been born four years after the advent of Islam, and must have been much older than six when she was subsequently engaged to the Prophet in 619.

6. Abu Bakr's concern about the delay of Aishah's full wedding

When the Hijrah took place in 622, Aishah did not travel with the Prophet but in a group led by her half-brother Abdullah and Talhah ibn Ubaidullah, a group that included her mother Umm Ruman and her sister Asma.

Meanwhile, the Prophet's other new wife Sawdah lodged in Madinah with the Prophet and his daughters. Aishah stayed with her parents, first in a house, then in the suburb of Sunh. The mosque was soon constructed, and alongside it the small private apartments for the Prophet's family.

Sawdah was installed in one of them, but the Prophet said nothing about settling Aishah in one.

This began to worry Abu Bakr, and he inquired the reason for the delay. The Prophet replied that it was because he could not afford his marriage portion to Aishah. Abu Bakr, eager to see his daughter married, paid it for the Prophet himself.¹²

According to some versions, the marriage then took place in Shawwal of Year 1 AH; others state that it was 7-8 months after their arrival in Madinah, or in the Shawwal of Year 2 AH, or after the Battle of Badr.¹³

Why should Abu Bakr have been so concerned about the slowness of the Prophet moving his daughter into his household as a wife if she was only a child? If she was not nine but a good deal older, the gentle chiding of his friend would make far more sense.

7. Aishah was playing on a swing when called to her marriage

¹² Ibn Sa'd VIII. 43.

¹³ Nawawi p.849; Tabari 1.1263.

Apparently Aishah was playing on a swing with her friends when she was taken inside and informed that she was now married. The phrase 'playing on a swing' is taken to imply that she was indeed a very young child. However, this does not necessarily suggest any such thing. Any household that includes a pleasant swing in its garden or yard will realize that very often teenagers congregate there, and make use of the swing while enjoying their conversations.

She may simply have been relaxing in the garden with young female friends.

8. The date of the death of Aishah

Most historians (though not all) agree that Aishah passed away when she was 67 years old. Moreover, Hisham ibn Urwah (763 CE), the grandson of Aishah's sister Asma, gave the date of her death as 50 AH/672 CE.¹⁴

Khalifa ibn al-Khayyat al-Ufuri (854 CE), an authority on lineage and biography, and Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal (855 CE) also tell us that Aishah breathed her last in 50 AH/672 CE.

The importance of this date cannot be underestimated. If she was 67 years old in 50 AH/672 CE, then at the time of the Hijrah in 622 she must have been 17 years old (and born in 605 CE); this again backs up the conclusion that she was 19 at the time of her marriage in 2 AH/624 CE, and not 9.

9. The status of the narratives in the Sahih collections

How is it, then, that the hadith collections of al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, an-Nisa'I and Ibn Majah all narrate Aishah's age at the time of her nikah as being merely six, and that she went to live in her husband's home at the age of nine?

It seems that they used Hisham's tradition for confirmation of this. However, it must be repeated again that Hisham's record is not altogether reliable, even though Hisham got his information from his own father, Asma's son Urwah. Many scholars, such as Ajurri, Uqayli, Abu al-Aswad and Imam Malik all remarked that none of the narratives Hisham recorded on his father's reference concerning Aishah were trustworthy – and the given reason is because they all originated in Iraq.

Even the narratives in the Sihah (the Authentic Books of Hadith) about Aishah's nikah which claim Aishah herself as the source are suspect, because the chain of authorities on which this narrative is based consists entirely of either Basri or Kufi elements.

Yaqub ibn Abi Shaybah, Ibn Kharash and Imam Malik, as also Ajurri, Uqayli and Abu al-Aswad, all maintain that Hisham's Iraqi references are invalidated, and untrustworthy. The reason is the very serious objection that these narratives were completely unknown to the people of Madinah.

Both Imam Malik and Imam al-Shafi'i declared: 'Any tradition with no roots in Hijaz has no substance, that means, it is not trustworthy.'¹⁵

¹⁴ 'Siyar-u-Alam-an-Nubala' by al-Dhahabi, Vol 11, pp.11-12.

¹⁵ 'Tadrib al-Rawi' (Egypt) p.23.

Therefore, since all the narratives and references related to Aishah's nikah and wedding, even those alleged to be on the authority of Aishah herself, originated in Iraq and were unknown to the scholars of Madinah, they cannot be trusted even though they fulfill the conditions laid down by some of the compilers of the Six Authentic Books.

The only piece of non-Iraqi evidence to back up the Iraqi material is the reference of Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Zuhri recording a similar statement – also on the authority of Urwah, Hisham's father. However, it has not been established whether al-Zuhri heard this directly from Urwah. Ibn Hajar, the great interpreter of al-Bukhari, stated:

"There is no proof that Muhammad ibn Shihab attended to Urwah directly, though it has been proved that he gathered references from other authorities, even greater than Urwah."¹⁶

So, if the references all go back to Hisham, what can be deduced from this?

Unfortunately, we can prove quite simply that his records are not consistent, and all hadith scholars agree that when a particular narrator contradicts his own narrative, then it should not be considered trustworthy.¹⁷

It was certainly Hisham's personal opinion (not a matter gleaned from any other source or scholar) that Aishah did pass away in 50 AH/672 CE. He also stated that his grandmother Asma was older than Aishah by ten years. Unfortunately for Hisham, as we have already seen, if Aishah died in 50 AH aged 67, she must have been born 17 years before the Hijrah, in 605. This means that his dates simply don't add up, for once again it makes Aishah 19 and not 9 at her full marriage.

10. Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi's statement examined

Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi, a great advocate of the view that Aishah was only six when her nikah was solemnized and nine when her wedding took place, is another example of a scholar who also unconsciously offers arguments against his own case. In his book 'Seerat-e-Aishah' he states:

"The last phase of Amir Mu'awiyah's Caliphate is the last stage of Aishah's life. At that time, she was 67 years old".¹⁸

In the same book, a few chapters later, he writes:

"Aishah was a widow and in that state she passed 40 years of her life." (Ibid).

Like so many others, Nadvi cannot have done his mathematics. If Aishah lived to be 67, with a widowhood spanning four decades, this confirms that she was 27 when the Prophet passed away and not 17. Looked at another way, since the Prophethood was a period of 23 years. Aishah must have been born four years prior to its commencement, and not four years after it. Further, it also supports the conclusion that if Aishah was 17 in the year of the Hijrah and entered the Prophet's home two years later, she must have been 19 and not 9 at her marriage.

¹⁶ 'Tahdhib al-Tahdhib' (Beirut) Vol IX/450).

¹⁷ 'Irshad al-Fuhul' (Egypt).

¹⁸ 'Sirat-e-Aishah' Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi, p.153).

11. Aishah's dolls

In the Sahih of al-Bukhari, a statement of Aishah herself is quoted in which she commented that a certain verse of the Qur'an (Surat al-Qamar:46) was revealed to the Prophet in Makkah when she was playing with her dolls.¹⁹

Surat al-Qamar was one of the early chapters of the Qur'an. Aishah, despite the reference to her dolls, knew that a revelation had been granted. It must be accepted, then, that she could not possibly have been born in the fourth year of the Prophethood. She would hardly have realized the significance of the happening when she was a toddler of around one to two years old! It makes far more sense to assume that she was around 9-10 years old – i.e. born in 605 CE.

Furthermore, the habit of a girl to play with dolls should not be used as an indication that she is less than six years old. The age that young girls play most with dolls is as they approach and enter puberty, especially in mock parenting games in which they are the 'mothers' and the dolls are their 'babies'.

Surat al-Qamar has not been dated precisely, but if it was revealed some five years before the Hijrah (617 CE), then if Aishah was born in 614 she was only three years old. However, if she was born in 605 she was 12, and far more likely to have dolls.

12. Aishah's 'playmates'

Sometimes, when the Prophet arrived at Aishah's room, she was 'playing with her playmates', and they scuttled away. The Prophet then kindly called them back and invited them to continue what they were doing.

'I used to play with dolls in the house of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and my friends would come over to play with me. They would hide when they saw the Messenger approaching, but he was in fact very happy to see them with me, and so we played together.' (reported in al-Bukhari and Muslim).

This is made to suggest at that time Aishah was indeed a very young child playing. However, if we stop emphasizing the word 'playing' and look at the fact that her young female friends who were with her promptly left the room, it seems far more likely that these friends were all well into their teens and not small children. They were socializing rather than playing.

Had they just been small children at games, it is highly unlikely that they would have run out when the Prophet arrived, especially in view of the fact that he was famous for his great love for small children, and willingness to join in their games.

It must also be borne in mind that there were no radio/television/videos in those days and different types of games were played and acts performed for entertainment and pastime.

One Eid day some Africans were celebrating and performing acts with spears. Hazrat Aishah watched this act with the Prophet.²⁰

¹⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari, Bab al-Tafsir. This playing with dolls is used to indicate her extreme youth.

²⁰ Al-Bukhari: An-Nikah.

Even today in Middle Eastern culture and the Sub-Continent, teenagers organize plays whereby marriage of bride and groom dolls are arranged by older teenage girls and younger children are invited to take part as guest of the mock wedding ceremony.

One of the hadiths concerning the dolls also unconsciously adds to the evidence that Aishah was not just a small child.

'One day the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) asked me: 'What are these?' 'My dolls,' I replied. 'What is this in the middle?' he asked. 'A horse,' I replied. 'And what are these things on it?' he asked. 'Wings,' I said. 'A horse with wings?' he asked. 'Have you not heard that Sulaiman, the son of Dawud, had horses with wings?' I said. Thereupon the Messenger laughed so heartily that I could see his back teeth!' (Abu Dawud).

This winged horse was quite a sophisticated toy. One would love to know where Aishah got it from, and from whom? However, the point here is that it is very unlikely that she was only a small child when this conversation with the Prophet took place. It is a perfect example of what the traditions said of her – that she had a quick mind, was well-read, and frequently gave the Prophet (and others) quick answers that were pretty sharp.

13. Aishah's Needlework

Aishah lived in a very simple apartment, as did all the Prophet's wives, but she was still house-proud and liked to do as much as she could to beautify her room and make it comfortable for the Prophet.

This led to a couple of hadiths which are very well known, but the likely age of Aishah at the time is usually not commented upon.

One of the early prohibitions was on art work which might distract a believer from their prayers, or tempt their minds away from true worship of the One True God. It was so commonplace in the times of jahiliyyah (ignorance) for homes to have little 'household gods', statues, paintings, and so on. God's revealed law was that no person was to create a graven image and bow down to it. Many strict Muslims took the prohibition to the extremes of having nothing pictorial whatsoever in their homes.

However, the Prophet had not given an outright prohibition, and depictions of plants, animals and birds were allowed on plane surfaces (not three-dimensional), such as cloths, paper, wall-drapes, rugs, carpets. There are sound hadiths which indicate the Prophet's dislike for such types of pictures, because they were reminiscent of those who lived in luxury, and also he commented that they distracted him from his prayers.

The reason for mentioning all this at this point, is that Aishah apparently spent some of her time creating soft furnishings with her needlework – a time-filler far more usual in a teenage girl than in a small child, no matter how precocious.

Muslim reported from Zayd ibn Khalid (who was quoting Abu Talhah); 'I heard from the Messenger's (the Prophet) statement – 'The angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog or statues'. I then went to see Aishah and asked her: 'Are you aware of this saying? Did you hear the Messenger of Allah (the Prophet) say this? She replied: 'No, but I will tell you what he did. Once, when he had gone on an expedition, I draped the door with a curtain having pictures on it. When he

returned and saw it, I could discern from his face that he disliked it. He pulled it down and tore it apart, saying: 'Allah has not commanded us to clothe stone and clay.' She said: 'We cut it and made two pillows out the cloth, stuffing them with palm fibres. He did not criticize me for that.'

Muslim also reported from Aishah: 'We had a curtain (Note: this was inside the house) with the figure of a bird on it. When the Messenger (the Prophet) entered the house he saw it right in front of him, and he said: 'Remove it from here. When I enter and see it, I am reminded of this world.'

The Prophet did not tell her to tear it up, but only to remove it from the place where it hung; he disliked seeing it there because it brought to his mind the world and its attractions. Al-Bukhari also reported Anas as saying: 'Aishah had covered part of her apartment with a drape. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) told her: 'Take it away from my sight, because its figures keep distracting me from my prayers.'²¹

14. Aishah's Account of the Miraj and the Hijrah

Amongst the hadiths emanating from Aishah are a detailed account of the Miraj (the Ascension of the Holy Prophet to the Heavens), which took place in 9 AH/619 CE, and of the Migration from Makkah to Madinah in 12 AH/622 CE. Her description is intelligent and mature, and not typical of an account as might have been given by a child of merely five years of age for the former, and eight for the later – if she was born in 614.

15. Aishah's role in the Battle of Uhud

On the occasion of the Battle of Uhud, it was recorded that Aishah and other ladies served the Muslim soldiers by taking drinking water to them on the battlefield. This battle took place in 2 AH/625 CE, in the same year as Aishah's marriage to the Prophet. Was Aishah nine or nineteen when she fetched water from Madinah and carried it to the battlefield in the foothills of the Uhud?

16. Aishah's knowledge

All the scholars agree that Aishah possessed an excellent brain, and had a very sound knowledge of the Holy Qur'an, the hadiths, and was also highly skilled in the fields of lineage, poetry, literature and criticism. It was claimed by many that she had excellent literary taste and a notable memory for poetry, which she could quote copiously, always finding a suitable couplet or stanza to fit various experiences, and cause amusement or admiration.

She was also skilled in the medical science of that age.

No doubt she acquired her knowledge of Qur'anic interpretation and other studies in theology from the best of teachers – the Prophet himself.

However, there is no indication or evidence to the fact that she learned the science of lineage or developed her taste for poetry and literature in the company of the Prophet. He was neither a poet nor an authority on lineal matters. It is also highly unlikely that he had the time for such extra-prophetic activities, or for educating his wife in these disciplines.

²¹ Yusuf al-Qaradawi: 'The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam', pp 111-112).

It is not told to us whether any other person in Madinah imparted this knowledge to Aishah. On the other hand, it is well known that her father Abu Bakr was an authority on linealogy and also had good taste in poetry and literature.

Therefore, it seems far more likely that Aishah gained her initial knowledge from studies with her father – and it is unlikely that she would have been immersed in these studies when she was but a child of less than 9 years of age. It seems far more likely that she was 19 and not 9 when she quit Abu Bakr's home in order to join her husband.

Incidentally, poetry was important to other family members. Her nephew, Urwah ibn Zubayr, was famous for memorizing many couplets. One occasion when somebody complimented him on his ability to memorize verse, he replied that his knack for it bore no comparison to that of his aunt Aishah, who was also adept in the prompt recitation of couplets relevant to any particular event, matter or occasion.

Indeed, Aishah had a remarkable command of language and expression. Her speeches in later life were famous for their exciting rhetoric, eloquence, and unique allegories and metaphors.

17. Her status as a jurist

Aishah became a great disseminator of Islamic teachings, law and particularly sayings of the Prophet. As many as 2210 traditions are recorded with reference to Aishah only and no other source. In al-Bukhari alone, 143 were attributed to her.

In fact, her status was not merely that of a great narrator, but rather she was a jurist in her own right, a commentator and a great theologian. She is considered the best among the female jurists. Even senior Companions of the Prophet approached her with queries regarding Islamic doctrines and tenets of faith. Persons no less than the Caliphs Umar and Uthman sought her help in resolving some complicated issues.

Abu Musa al-Ashari once said: 'Wherever we met some problem in the comprehension of some law, we always approached Aishah and she would solve our problems in a scholarly manner.'

Masruq Hamadani recorded: 'I often saw some senior and great Companions of the Prophet seeking Aishah's help in resolving matters related to inheritance.'

Urwah ibn Zubayr stated: 'I never saw anyone more aware than Aishah of matters pertaining to the tenets and doctrines covering the lawful and the forbidden things and various branches of knowledge, for instance poetry and literature.'

It is important to realize not just her later authority, but also that the Prophet had urged his friends to 'consult Aishah' over Islamic advice, even while he still lived.

This surely indicates that Aishah only came to the Prophet as his wife after being educated and trained by her father, at the age of 18-19, and not earlier.

CONCLUSION

Taking all the various pieces of evidence into consideration, the conclusion of this investigation is that the nikah of Aishah to the Prophet of Islam took place when she was around 16-17 years old, and not 6; and her marriage was solemnized when she was 19 and not 9. The Prophet died when she was 28, not 18; and she became one of the leading scholars and teachers of Islam, giving aid and advice to the subsequent Caliphs.

She lived in widowhood some 40 years, and died in 50 AH/672 CE at the age of 67.²²

Sincere and genuine Muslims who believe that she was a minor when she married, are humbly requested to have second thoughts and to derive conclusion afresh after considering all the evidences offered here.

²² Her death was also reported as on 17th Ramadan in the year 58 AH/680 CE, at the age of 73. 'The Family of the Holy Prophet' S.M. Madani.